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EXTENSION WORK IN THE NEWER AGRICULTURE

C. W. Warburton



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

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EXTENSION WORK IN THE NEWER AGRICULTURE*

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The very cordial welcome and the optimistic note sounded by President Knapp in welcoming this group to the Iowa State College was in keeping with our anticipation. All of us who have had contact with this institution know that it has a record for service and hospitality. My earliest memories of it center around two frequently recurring phrases, "Science with practice" and "Thrice welcome." We wish to assure President Knapp that we shall avail ourselves to the fullest of the facilities of the college, and if the results of our deliberations bring about improvement in extension work, he can feel that the accommodations offered and the hospitality extended were no small factors.

The present extension organization consists of 3,470 county extension agents, 982 specialists, and 469 supervisors, which, with the clerical force, make a total of approximately 5,400 persons, a relatively small force of people to serve the 6,400,000 farms in the United States. During the year 1925 they cooperated with the farming people in putting on 770,000 demonstrations. They came in contact with 18,581,000 people and changed more than 3,800,000 practices. The rural people enjoyed the program offered by the Extension Service, as indicated by the fact that more than 208,000 men and women gave their time and energy in the capacity of local leaders passing useful and practical information to their neighbors and friends. Approximately 565,000 boys and girls caught the spirit of service and self-help and joined the 4-H clubs. An appreciative public spent more than a million dollars sending these young people to short courses, fairs, and expositions to participate in club activities and increase their knowledge and experience. State legislatures continued their support, and the Congress appropriated for farmers' cooperative demonstration work \$1,308,540 in addition to the Smith-Lever appropriation of \$5,880,000. At the request of the Bureau of the Budget, the department reduced the estimate for farmers' cooperative demonstrations for the next fiscal year by \$40,000. After a review of the extension work by the subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee handling the agricultural appropriation bill, this amount was restored, making the funds available for next year the same as for the current fiscal year. It is excellent evidence that the people look favorably on extension work and desire that public support be continued.

*Presented at the North Central States Extension Conference, Iowa State College, Ames, Iowa, April 26, 1926.

I have been asked to discuss extension work in the newer agriculture. Although the subject may indicate that I am about to prophesy the future of the extension movement, I assure you that I have no such intention. My discussion will be confined to a few suggestions. The future of extension work will be largely determined by the capacity and vision of its personnel, especially its county extension agents, both men and women. In the earlier day of demonstration work in the South, practical farmers were employed. Only slight consideration was given to their educational qualifications. Some of the most outstanding work of that period was done by these practical men, but in recent years the number of college-trained men in extension work in the South has increased steadily. At present, practically all county extension agents, men and women alike, are college trained. This change in the educational standards of the personnel was brought about as the result of field experience rather than because of an organized plan. In the North, the work began with the prerequisite of a college education or its equivalent for appointment as a county extension agent.

During the 10-year period just closed the problems of the county extension agents have changed. The agronomy work is typical of the change that has taken place in every phase of agriculture and home economics included in the extension program. In the earlier years the value of improved seed was a matter of demonstration on a few scattered farms. It was basic work that had to be done. It was simple with only a few people involved. The county extension agent to-day finds a more complicated situation. He must determine with the specialist the variety best suited to the locality. The source of the seed must be determined. The question of certified seed must be considered. The method of handling seed to make it available to the users must be discussed. Relations with established lines of business must be worked out. The requirements of the markets must be considered. Improved seed demonstration work has ceased to be a problem of a few men. It has come to be a complicated matter involving the work of the experiment station, the seed associations, the marketing organizations, relations with dealers and cooperatives. It may involve the use of seed produced in other States, and products sold in markets with which the agent is not familiar.

The development of the dairy extension work presents a similar situation. The earlier work included improved-feeding practices, cow testing, purebred-sire introduction, and barn improvement. To-day the county extension agent is continuing the older lines, but in addition he is called upon to work with the farmers in developing cooperative producer associations for the distribution of whole milk, cheese-producers' associations, bovine-tuberculosis eradication, dairy-inspection work and a multitude of complicated problems, some of which are still unsolved. These two illustrations are typical of the present-day problems of county extension agents. The field of home economics furnishes similar illustrations. Extension is working with organized rural people. It must be prepared to cooperate with regulatory agencies. It must understand clearly its relation to both farm and business organizations.

In the earlier period of this work the employment of an agent in a county was a popular idea. His very presence in a county was news and a sign of progress. Outstanding problems were simple and yielded to simple

treatment. The people did not think of the agent as the mouthpiece of the agricultural college and the United States Department of Agriculture. Powerful farm organizations were not matching their wits for control of the agricultural field. Legislative bodies were not engaged in serious consideration of agricultural problems. A smooth-working, efficient organization of inexperienced men could render satisfactory service then, but it would fall far short of minimum needs under present-day conditions.

The extension organization is a recognized force in the agricultural field. Correspondence received by the department indicates that the public has come fully to recognize the public character of the work. Let a county extension agent become an advocate for or against pending legislation and there immediately arises a protest against his activities. If an agent becomes a rabid partisan in conflicts between rural organizations an equally strong protest is received. The most surprising thing to all of us is that so few of the agents get into trouble through a misunderstanding of the public nature of their work. The information contained in Miscellaneous Circular No. 3, familiar to all of you, has done much to enable the agent to understand his job. The general trend toward the payment of salary and expense of agents from public funds has been no small factor in bringing about this understanding. The turnover in personnel will always remain high. The successful agent will have many offers to enter the commercial field or become a farm operator. The problem of training and replacement will continue to be a big task for the supervisory force.

What, then, should be the attitude of the administrators of extension work as to the qualifications of county extension agents? It is evident that the task is increasingly complicated. Resignations will continue. Shall we continue to employ the best young men fresh from college or shall we require at least five years of experience in agricultural work after graduation? Although this may seem to be a big step, it is the only one that can insure the type of man or woman that the job requires. As a matter of fact, the step has already been taken in large measure. Of the last 10 appointees to the county extension forces in each of the States represented here, 60 of the total of 130 have been out of college 5 years or more, and 10 more have been out more than 4 years. More than half of the new appointees, therefore, have had at least 4 years' experience since graduation. Only 22 of the 130 were appointed during their first year out of college.

With a group of experienced agents we need not fear the complicated problem of the present day. Farms that have survived the last five years are obviously efficient. Changes recommended must be the result of mature thinking based upon experience. The new agent must be able to see clearly his relation to the college, the experiment station, and the United States Department of Agriculture. He must be ready to accept the task of bringing to the farmer the results of experiments and make the educational program his first consideration. He must be able to understand that the public recognizes him as a spokesman for both the college and the department. He can express no private opinion as such for the public will understand it as the decision of the institutions he represents. He must be able to recognize unbiased information and possess the ability to give it to others in an impartial manner. Only the well-trained men and women with experience after finishing college can meet the rigid requirements of the next 10 years.

The responsibility of the supervisory force is increasing with present-day developments. Have we been diligent and careful in selecting the men and women for county positions? Education alone is not a sufficient qualification. Personality, attitude, and cooperativeness will be revealed in his work after he leaves college. Have we trained the agent carefully before we left him to his own resources? Have we developed with him plans of work and insisted upon adherence to the fundamental plan? Have we supervised with a complete understanding of the task ourselves? Have we instilled loyalty and faith in the entire organization? In any line of work the supervisor is a key person in the organization. If he trains, inspires, and leads, the agents in the counties are happy, effective, and resourceful. If he finds fault, shows lack of loyalty and judgment, the character of the work will be poor and the morale broken.

The conferences of supervisory forces will no doubt review carefully their problems. The result should be a larger volume and higher quality of work, with a more contented group of agents.

In the scheme of extension education, work with farm women came as an afterthought, and as such it has developed in many States. It, too, has shown marked improvement. The early work was directed largely toward the improvement of the skill of the housewife in such matters as canning, baking, garment making, and kitchen improvement. The program has expanded to include nutrition, home management, community activities, and citizenship. Good roads and the right to vote have extended the sphere of the farm woman. Her interests are leading her beyond the garden gate. The colleges and the department have much that she can use at this time. Let us not wait until an insistent demand is made. Let us anticipate the needs of the farm woman and supply help to her with the same vigor that characterized the introduction of county agent work.

While the responsibility for the organization of county work for women rests on the State home demonstration leaders, it is a responsibility which should be shared alike by everyone engaged in extension work. At present there are approximately 134 county home demonstration agents in the North Central States, about one-seventh of the total number in the entire country. It is an excellent beginning, but it is not enough. In addition to the extension activities organized by home demonstration agents, there is some outstanding work organized by agricultural agents assisted by home economic specialists. This is an excellent temporary arrangement to develop the preliminary organization. The fullest and most satisfying program will be worked out, however, only when a capable woman agent is employed in each county, organizing, directing, and developing the work of farm women with the same enthusiasm that is now directed to the program of farm activities. The least that we can do is to acquaint the farm women of the county with the information available and the possibility of a richer and happier farm life through a well-organized extension program. Where these women are in possession of all the facts and familiar with the results, we can safely leave it to them to find ways and means for obtaining the services of an efficient agent. The farm women of the Corn Belt will need no urging to join with the extension force when we have made them familiar with the service and help available.

It is sometimes argued that Corn Belt farm women, who, on the average, are perhaps better educated than farm women of other regions, for that reason have

less need for help from extension workers. The enthusiasm with which Corn Belt women have participated in extension activities wherever they have had opportunity is sufficient answer to such an assertion. One of the most ardent advocates and enthusiastic supporters of home demonstration work I have ever met is a graduate of this college, who lived until recently on a northern Iowa farm. With unusual advantages of travel and education in early life this woman still found much in extension teachings to help and inspire her.

It has been pointed out that the volume of home-economics information is limited and the facts ready for extension are not sufficient to make a program. Even though this statement is accepted there is still every reason to develop a broader extension program in home economics. The insistent demand from extension forces for information in the agricultural field has had a most stimulating and wholesome effect on the experiment stations and the attitude of the public toward their support. Is it not logical to assume that home-economics extension will have a similar effect, and that solutions to the home problems will come when the alert extension forces send back the problems of the field to the college for investigation? The expansion of the home-economics program in the Department of Agriculture is indicative of the increasing demand from the field. The home program must develop and each of us can do much to stimulate its growth. Unlike some sections of this country, the Central States are most of them rich enough to have what they want. We believe that the home program is strong enough to win a place for itself with a little help from each of us.

The old edict of the farm that young people should be seen and not heard is not in keeping with the newer agriculture or present-day business. Practically every line of business is admitting them to the council table, giving them responsibility and rejoicing in their ability to assume it. Agriculture can be no exception because the very life of the whole movement is in the hands of the young people. Our club work has been outstanding in reaching the young people of the preadolescent and the adolescent age, but we have neglected to reach out and interest the young people between the ages of 16 and 23. It is a distinct loss to rural development to center all our interest on the younger group and then desert them when they come to young manhood and womanhood, expecting them to return to an interest in extension eight or 10 years later. It has been said that they can not be reached, that their dominant interests are elsewhere. Such a statement is unworthy of a group of men and women who are doing the impossible every day. It may be necessary for a few States to assign some one specifically for this task to put an end to this mental barrier that has so long kept us from an attractive and useful field. A very promising piece of work with young people of that age is now in its second year in Redwood County, Minn. We hope that it marks the beginning of a substantial movement for extension work with young people between the ages of 16 and 23 years.

During the last two years the Office of Cooperative Extension Work has been making some studies of the effectiveness of extension work. Records obtained on 7,088 farms in 9 States show that 76 per cent of them changed some practice. The average number of practices changed per farm and home was 3.4. Extension work has been under way in these counties from 6 to 15 years. It represents slightly better than an average of the work done throughout the country. A study of the results of extension work as shown by these surveys indicates rather clearly that the problem of reaching the farmers is no small one and that adjustment in agriculture comes slowly. We should lose no time

in making a state-wide program, utilizing the best information available so that every step will be in the direction of a well-chosen goal. If the work goes along in a haphazard way without definite plans, we may find it necessary to make radical adjustment and undo much of our work that was accomplished at very great effort. The long-time program is a possibility. The development of the dairy industry in Wisconsin is but one of the many illustrations of the results that may be obtained with persistent effort spread over a period of 25 to 30 years. Several of the Western States, notably Oregon and Colorado, have made a worth-while beginning on their long-time programs.

Development of a program such as we have in mind involves the cooperation of rural organizations of the State under the leadership of the college. It puts the college in the position that it should rightly occupy - leadership in matters concerned with the development of the farm and farm home. True, we can not fully visualize the program developed and in operation. Some problems must be met when we reach them. It is sufficient for us at this time to determine if long-time program building is worth while. If our decision is in the affirmative, we will find a way. In the long run cooperation of farmers, experiment-station workers, and extension forces on a single program means success. Even though it is not the perfect program, it will set up a common worth-while objective toward which all can strive.

Our achievements in production are outstanding and recognized by all agricultural people. This is a source of satisfaction but can not be considered a goal. We must do more to help the farmer to produce in the most economical way, and to market his crops and livestock efficiently. The development of leadership among rural people gives us a higher type of satisfaction, and the recent development of leadership among rural women comes a little closer to a realization of a lasting achievement. A careful analysis of the accomplishments of extension work makes us all feel that we have set for ourselves a higher standard of extension education. A separate section of extension work for rural women, apart from the production and marketing activities of the farm, was perhaps a natural development. From an extension standpoint, however, greater satisfaction will come when all the extension people become a little more home-minded, when we can see the efforts of all the family bent upon the home and the family. We need a little more vision and the desire to pass on to others the hope and promise of agriculture as expressed in better living.

Let us look forward to the day when our men and women agents, our specialists in agriculture and home economics, fully appreciate and strive for the ultimate goal in extension - a home with children in radiant health, a mother with broad interests and a well-managed household, a father proud in managerial ability that takes from the soil an income sufficient to maintain a satisfactory standard of life, and, above all else, a firm purpose on the part of all to make the Corn Belt farm the happiest, healthiest, most satisfying place to live in all this broad land of ours.

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